NCA-11/26
BACKGROUND REPORT 5-6280 NOVEMBER 26, 1978
COREY/KUALA LUMPUR

MALAYSIA'S REFUGEE CRISIS

INTRO: THE FATE OF TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ABOARD A SHIP OFF MALAYSIA'S COAST HAS ATTRACTED WORLD ATTENTION TO A PROBLEM OF INCREASINGLY SERIOUS PROPORTIONS. WITH A BACKGROUND REPORT ON MALAYSIA'S REFUGEE CRISIS HERE IS WAYNE COREY IN KUALA LUMPUR.

TEXT: AFTER THE COMMUNIST VICTORY IN SOUTH VIETNAM THREE YEARS AGO, THE FIRST DESTINATION OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WAS THAILAND. BUT PERIODIC REPORTS OF POLICE BRUTALITY, THE THEFT OF THE REFUGEE'S GOLD AND OTHER VALUABLES, AND ATTACKS ON REFUGEE SHIPS BY PIRATES SOON MADE THAILAND UNATTRACTIVE.

WHEN THE FIRST REFUGEES BEGAN TO ARRIVE IN MALAYSIA THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY AMONG THE WARM AND FRIENDLY MALAYSIAN PEOPLE. UNTIL THIS YEAR THE NUMBER OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS HERE WAS MANAGEABLE. DEDICATED UNITED NATIONS REFUGEE OFFICERS SUPERVISED SEVERAL WELL-RUN REFUGEE CAMPS.

THE SITUATION HAS NOW CHANGED. IT'S A DIRECT RESPONSE TO A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES COMING TO MALAYSIA IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER AND A DOUBLING AND TRIPLING OF THE NUMBERS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER. THERE ARE MORE THAN FORTY THOUSAND REFUGEES--MOSTLY ETHNIC CHINESE ABLE TO BRIBE CORRUPT VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS--NOW HERE IN THIS COUNTRY. THOUSANDS MORE ARE CERTAINLY ON THEIR WAY AND THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT IS NOW USING ALL ITS RESOURCES TO TRY TO HALT THE FLOW. THIS MEANS MAXIMUM AIR AND NAVAL COASTAL PATROLS AND THE CONFINING OF MOST REFUGEES PERMITTED TO STAY TO AN OVER CROWDED AND UNDER-SUPPLIED ISLAND REFUGEE CAMP. WHEN POSSIBLE REFUGEE BOATS ARE FORCED OUT OF MALAYSIA'S TERRITORIAL WATERS.

ETHNIC MALAYS LIVING ALONG THE EASTERN COAST HAVE BEEN ANNOYED AND MORE AND MORE ANGERED AT THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO REFUGEES -- AND THEY ESPECIALLY RESENT AID GIVEN TO THE ETHNIC CHINESE. THE MALAYS THINK THEY SHOULD RECEIVE IT. AMONG MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT AND POLICE OFFICIALS THERE IS A GENUINE FEAR OF A POSSIBLE SECURITY THREAT.

VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST AGENTS ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE COME WITH THE REFUGEES, AND MALAYSIA'S EFFICIENT SPECIAL BRANCH HAS BEEN TRYING TO IDENTIFY THEM.

THE PACE OF RESETTLING THE REFUGEES ELSEWHERE HAS NOT KEPT UP WITH THE NUMBER OF FRESH ARRIVALS. THE DEPARTURE OF SOME OF THE TWENTY-FIVE HUNDRED REFUGEES ABOARD THE HAI HONG IS MEANINGLESS IN TERMS OF THE OVERALL REFUGEE PROBLEM HERE. TO SOME EXTENT MALAYSIA NOW PINS ITS HOPE FOR AN EASING OF THE SITUATION ON A MEETING IN GENEVA NEXT MONTH OF THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT SAYS THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER COUNTRIES THAT DIRECTLY TOOK PART IN THE VIETNAM WAR HAVE THE MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY. THE UNITED STATES SAYS THE REFUGEES ARE AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. IT HAS ALREADY ACCEPTED MORE OF THEM THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY. (SIGNED)

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